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Implementation of the proposal for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and the plan of action of the United Nations Forum on Forests: progress in implementation

Social and cultural aspects of forests

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an assessment of the status of implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) proposals for action related to social and cultural aspects of forests. The report shows that there has been a notable shift in national forestry policies in most member countries towards more people-oriented forestry. The fundamental problem is the limited scope of the IPF/IFF proposals with respect to social and cultural aspects. The social and cultural aspects of forests need to be placed into a wider context to prevent the further marginalization of forest issues in the global agenda. Reluctance to devolve control over resources to local communities, coupled with an inadequate understanding of devolution mechanisms, as well as lack of financial and human resources, were cited as some of the biggest obstacles to pro-poor forestry initiatives.

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I. Introduction

1. The fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests will review the implementation of proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) related to social and cultural aspects of forests. The draft of the present report was prepared for the Forum by the Centre for International Forestry Research, in consultation with other member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, to facilitate those discussions. The report provides an assessment of the status of implementation of the relevant IPF/IFF proposals for action, discussion of the means of implementation (finance, transfer of environmentally sound technologies and capacity-building) and discussion of common items of the Forum[1] related to social and cultural aspects of forests.

2. Despite its significant potential, the forest sector has typically contributed very little to the global discussion about social and economic development. Forests provide fully or in part subsistence for one fourth of the world's poor and any actions towards increasing the earnings from forests will likely provide benefits to the rural poor living in or near forest-abundant areas. Thus, increasing and establishing access to the resource and defining stable, transferable ownership rights will help poor people to diversify their livelihood strategies and, in many cases, will encourage sustainable use of the resource. The Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction and ensuring environmental sustainability therefore hinge on sustainable management of forests, since this is a component of achieving overall environmental stability and sustained economic growth.

3. The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002 addressed and emphasized, among many other important issues, the role of sustainable forest management in overall sustainable development and, more specifically, in poverty eradication, improvement in food security, and access to safe drinking water and affordable energy. The proposed actions emphasize the role of institution-building, and partnerships among stakeholders, including Governments and the private sector, indigenous and local communities and non-governmental organizations, in moving towards sustainable forest management. The Summit called for enhanced political commitment to achieving sustainable forest management, by endorsing it as a priority in the international political agenda, taking full account of the linkages between the forest sector and other sectors through integrated approaches.[2]

4. The twelfth World Forestry Congress, held in Québec City, Canada, from 21 to 28 September 2003, highlighted the major theme of "forests for people". The Congress underlined the fact that there is a lack of understanding of the role of forests in poverty eradication. It presented recommendations for addressing poverty and sustaining livelihoods, placing people at the centre of forest management and enabling people to manage forests sustainably. It also provided other relevant recommendations on education and the role of youth; working conditions, safety, rights and remuneration of forestry workers; the contribution of trees outside forests and their importance to urban communities; women in the forestry profession; and economic and social inequalities, overconsumption of the rich and the quest of the poor to meet their basic needs.

5. The challenge, then, is to link firmly the IPF/IFF proposals to the broader development agenda. There is a need to demonstrate intersectoral linkages and to look at issues in the context of the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by the Heads of State at the Millennium Summit in 2000.

6. National reports submitted to the United Nations Forum on Forests at its fourth session, findings from various country and organization-led initiatives and general literature were used in compiling the present report. Contributions from members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests were also important in broadening the focus of the report.

II. Background

7. Until relatively recently, forestry in many parts of the world largely took the form of top-down government programmes and projects that centred on the introduction of new technologies. Frequently, especially in developing countries, this involved establishing village woodlots, planting fast-growing species and demarcation of protected forest areas where local people were often excluded. Indigenous species, local agroforestry systems and traditional resource management practices, as well as institutions for communal forest stewardship, were often ignored. Typically, decisions about forest management were often taken in centralized government offices, far from the people affected by changes in forest management.

8. It is noted that only a few national forest programmes devote a substantial portion of resources to issues such as poverty, decent work, and the role of women, youth and indigenous people, although the issues have recently been receiving more attention in forest policy processes. As a result, forests' contribution to the well-being of the poor, the forest workforce, women, youth and indigenous peoples are neither well-defined nor documented.

9. Nevertheless, in the past decades, some social issues, and particularly the need for communities to assume more active roles in resource management, have come to the fore. Social forestry emerged, challenging conventional management regimes that relied on the authority of the State to hold unilateral power over management decision-making. With increasing pressures on forest resources and fiscal constraints on government forest agencies, it is now clear that many Governments in developing countries are no longer able to manage and protect public forestlands on their own. Forest-dependent communities are often the best positioned logistically to develop and impose the intensified use controls needed to sustain forest ecosystems. At the same time, worldwide trends towards democratization and decentralization have put the spotlight on communities' demands to play a central role in forest management. With the rising level of education and access to information in most parts of the world, people are demanding more responsibilities and rights over the natural resources upon which they depend. While conventional management approaches emphasized exclusion and marginalization of local communities and indigenous people in forest programmes, current approaches now centre on active involvement of forest-dependent communities and incorporation of local people's social and cultural concerns in decision-making on all aspects of forest management.

10. Governments worldwide are beginning to recognize the legitimate rights of forest-dependent people, ancestral domain claims and the opportunities that community involvement presents in helping to sustain natural forest ecosystems and increasing forest cover. The motives for these moves towards decentralization vary, but most Governments hope that the process will help to reduce bureaucracy, make decision-making more democratic, distribute the benefits derived from exploiting resources more fairly and make their use and exploitation more efficient.

11. While there is an observable worldwide shift to policies and programmes that are supportive of community involvement and decentralization in forest management, the challenge has often been how this transition should take place. Critical to this transition is the establishment of adaptive institutional arrangements, policies and programmes to facilitate devolution of greater authority to forest-dependent communities, while supporting new partnerships among communities, Governments and the private sector. In practice, community involvement would have to move beyond "invited" participation, which frequently means an invitation to comply with preset objectives within the framework of debates that obscure the experiences, perspectives and political and material interests of the poorest forest users.

12. Through strengthened participation, not just in policy but also in science, poorer forest users can genuinely shape agendas for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. This could take the form of participatory research strategies and deliberative procedures in which poorer forest users help to set agendas and questions, allowing perspectives from local settings to feed upwards into and shape the terms of policy debate. Such procedures would need to promote aspects of a political and legal culture that enables critique, builds people's confidence and skills and makes space for people's own perspectives, knowledge and interests to inform policy debates.

13. The key IPF/IFF proposals for action related to social and cultural aspects of forests have been grouped into three types of action (see table below): fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of forest genetic resources; the role of women in sustainable forest management; and the enhanced role of indigenous and local communities in sustainable forest management.

14. Other proposals for action relevant to the social and cultural aspects of forests that have been reported upon at previous United Nations Forum on Forests sessions and that will not be covered in the present report include those falling under: combating deforestation and forest degradation;[3] forest conservation and protection of unique types of forests and fragile ecosystems;[4] rehabilitation and restoration of degraded lands and promotion of natural and planted forests, all of which were covered at the second session of the Forum;[5] and economic aspects of forests, covered at the third session of the Forum.[6] It should be noted that the issues on economic aspects of forests, such as those related to public goods aspects of forests, responsible private sector and well-defined property rights, addressed in the report are equally relevant to the scope of the present report. Proposals for action of relevance to social and cultural aspects of forests that will be addressed in other reports of the Secretary-General at the fourth session of the Forum include: those regarding traditional forest-related knowledge,[7] as well as proposals related to monitoring assessment and reporting.[8]

III. Implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action

15. Progress on implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and lessons learned are discussed in section III.A. Emerging issues are discussed in section III.B. These are internationally significant issues that are related to the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, which have not been addressed by the IPF/IFF proposals for action. The means of implementation are discussed in section III.C. Three relevant common items, as identified in the Forum's multi-year programme of work (see table), are discussed in section III.D.

A. Progress on implementation and emerging issues

1. Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of forest genetic resources

16. Many countries with developing economies and limited scientific infrastructure have not been able to engage fully in and benefit from the rapid scientific and technological advances that make new and varied use of genetic resources. At the same time, many companies and research institutions in developed countries seek novelty in the genetic resources they study and use and many look outside their borders for new leads. The great abundance of forest genetic resources in tropical forests remains valuable in the development of new products and many companies continue to seek access to those materials. Current collection activities and disposition of existing ex-situ collections have raised fears of biopiracy, as most countries lacked the appropriate policy and legal instruments to ensure prior informed consent and equitable benefit sharing.

Table
Summary of Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action related to social and cultural aspects of forests

Characteristics of the IPF/IFF proposals for action		*Proposal(s) for action*
Type of action called for	**Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of forest genetic resources** – Promote the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of forest genetic resources	IFF 56 (j) Note: Also related to the proposals for action addressed in the Secretary-General's reports on traditional forest-related knowledge and forest-related scientific knowledge
	The role of women in sustainable forest management – Involve women in national forest programmes and enhance their role in sustainable forest management	IFF 56 (m), IFF 56 (n), IFF 66 (also in the following cluster)
	Enhanced role of indigenous and local communities in sustainable forest management – Development and implementation of programmes for sustainable forest management – Support to indigenous people and local communities by funding sustainable forest management projects, capacity-building, information dissemination and participation	IPF 17 (a), IPF 17 (f), IPF 29 (c), IPF 77 (f), IPF 131 (b), IFF 56 (f), IFF 66, IFF 115 (d), IFF 121 (b)
Common items	**Monitoring, assessment and reporting on social data**	IFF 121 (b) (also in the preceding cluster), IFF 129 (a)
	Promoting public participation	IPF 89 (h)
	Social aspects addressed in national forest programmes – National forest programmes and the socially relevant elements	IFF 122 (b), IFF 122 (d), IFF 129 (d), IFF 140 (a), IFF 144

(a) Progress and trends in the implementation of relevant proposals for action

17. Many member countries reported that they were signatories to various international conventions that guide access to and benefit sharing in forest genetic resources. In most such countries, access to and benefits from forest genetic resources is guided by policies, codes of conduct and legal instruments that are consistent with international conventions. In other countries and much of Africa, issues of access to forest genetic resources and equitable benefit sharing are still to be addressed at the policy and legislative levels. A few countries, for example,

Guyana and New Zealand, have formulated policies that explicitly recognize the need for indigenous communities to benefit directly from any commercialization of forest genetic resources found in their areas. In some cases, these policies make provisions for indigenous communities to get assistance in negotiating and documenting terms of equitable benefit-sharing arrangements. Most countries also indicated that they now recognized traditional knowledge of indigenous communities as intellectual property that should be protected by patenting laws to ensure that those communities benefited from use of that knowledge. Policy and legislative instruments to implement these ideas are, however, not yet well defined in most cases. The report of the Secretary-General on traditional forest-related knowledge (E/CN.18/2004/7) provides additional information on this issue, particularly as regards the utilization of traditional knowledge for sustainable forest management, the development of intellectual property rights for traditional forest-related knowledge and the promotion of equitable benefit sharing.

18. Countries have adopted highly creative and situation-specific benefit-sharing best practices involving both monetary and non-monetary benefits in the short, medium and long term. They also noted increasing responsiveness among non-governmental organizations and the private sector to the demands of source countries for more equitable sharing of benefits of genetic resources. Intermediary institutions have brokered successful benefit-sharing agreements between source countries and commercial users tailored to specific circumstances, but guided by basic standards of best practice.

(b) Experiences and lessons learned

19. Despite having put in place the policies and codes of conduct to promote equitable sharing of forest genetic resources, most countries have found the implementation of these policies to be highly challenging, as this would require detailed management of data on collections in such a way that ex-situ collectors can honour commitments they made in the terms under which they acquired specimens. In most cases, countries have found it very difficult to track or control successive uses of or modifications to the materials collected.

20. Forest genetic resources are accessed from the country of origin by the private sector through various routes and they often pass through many hands before the end products reach the markets for consumers. Sometimes the product that is commercialized is not physically linked to the original genetic resources collected, but may have been manufactured based on chemical structures originally found in nature. Ex-situ collections of materials can be kept for hundreds of years and, by the time the material is eventually used, records of where it was collected, and under what terms, may be unavailable. All these factors make it extremely difficult to monitor the exchange of genetic resources and their derivatives and to enforce access and benefit-sharing agreements. As a result, a flexible and highly informed approach to access and benefit-sharing arrangements at the national level is the most effective.

21. Establishing instruments to ensure equitable sharing of genetic resources between source countries and processors has proved to be a daunting task. The problem is even more acute when establishing benefit-sharing mechanisms to channel fair and equitable remunerations to local and indigenous communities that are major stakeholders in the sustainability of such genetic resources. If indigenous

communities are to benefit from forest genetic resources, more creative, indirect methods of rewarding source communities need to be developed to ensure equitability. The use of transfer payments for forest products and services being provided could be a workable option for achieving this.

2. The role of women in sustainable forest management

22. Today, in many countries around the world, rural women are still the major caretakers and users of forests. Each day, they walk long distances to gather fuelwood and fodder and women, with the help of children, are mostly engaged in the collection of edible fruits, nuts, plants, leaves and small animals. They use bark, roots and herbs for medicines and tree fibre to make baskets and mats. Women are also central to the management of forested catchments, which prevent soil loss and ensure a continuous supply of clean water for humans and livestock. Far more women than any other social group are involved in the processing of non-timber forest products into goods for household use and cash income.

23. Activities related to forestry often demand a great deal of women's time and labour in rural areas. In many parts of the world, women's wealth of knowledge on forest resources has either been ignored or undermined, owing to lack of voice, unfavourable land-tenure structures, restrictive cultural practices, low levels of education and limited access to credit. Women are often excluded from decision-making and neglected by development programmes, even when they act as heads of household, which they often do.

(a) Progress and trends in the implementation of relevant proposals for action

24. Gender-sensitive community forestry programmes by national forestry departments in many developing countries, in collaboration with international research and development agencies, have achieved high levels of participation by women and have generated many lessons for project managers and implementers. In most of these programmes, there have been reports of various initiatives by women, which not only contribute to the development and protection of their forests, but also establish women and women groups as independent decision makers. Most such initiatives are making a notable contribution to reforestation and forest management efforts through the dedicated work of committed groups of women.

25. In many ways, rural women are often the most hurt by the global problem of deforestation, but they have also proved to be crucial to the solution. Legendary cases of rural women leading the resistance to cutting of forests have been reported from Cape Verde, China, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, the Sudan and Thailand. From their experiences, women in these areas knew that the cutting of forests would lead to flooding and landslides. They are also planting trees to stabilize soils and hillsides and produce more forest products, establishing greenbelts and shelter belts. These are some of the numerous examples of how women have turned sustainable forest management from rhetoric to reality and improved their families' livelihoods at the same time.

26. Because of the increased recognition of women's contributions to forests, most Member States reported that local foresters, community development agents and development assistance programmes were increasingly involving women, and their needs and knowledge, in forestry project design and implementation. They were supporting women's groups of various kinds, making credit and income available to

women and exploring local gender issues, as well as taboos, customs and other constraints to a woman's potential to participate in decision-making and to use forests sustainably.

27. Member States reported many cases of women who have succeeded in different spheres within forestry. Deliberate policies to increase female students in the forestry disciplines and associated research and extension have seen the composition of graduates rising from less than 5 per cent in the early 1990s to nearly 50 per cent by 2002 in many developing countries. In the Philippines, an extraordinary 54 per cent of the graduates of the University of the Philippines Los Banos College of Forestry are women. Women have also become practising foresters in sufficient numbers to have largely dispelled the myth that "forestry is a man's domain". In the United States Forest Service, about 30 per cent of today's forestry professionals and 20 per cent of the supervisors are women, as compared to 1 per cent in 1976.

28. Women have also been moving into positions of responsibility in the private sector in many countries. They are top executives in multinational wood and paper companies, trade associations, wood import companies and allied businesses in the developed countries, and producers and exporters in Latin America, Asia and Africa. A number of women are chairpersons or board members of international forestry research and development organizations and committees that make key decisions on forestry issues.

(b) Experiences and lessons learned

29. The majority of initiatives have noted that reaching women, and people in general, is much more complex and often takes longer than anticipated. Working with women sometimes requires a more sustained effort than dealing with men, because of the generally lower levels of numeracy, increased workloads and conflicting demands on women's time, legal issues such as land tenure and lack of experience or cultural sensitivities to interacting with outsiders or men. Project strategies, work plans and human and financial resources therefore need to be determined at the outset with these insights in mind.

30. The contribution of women in the forestry sector varies from massive involvement at the grass-roots level to a much leaner presence at the professional and technical levels. Too often, a limited view of women's participation in forestry as a provision for labour builds negative perceptions of exploitation and increased workloads. Targeting women's participation should be broader to ensure that women are not deprived of job and training opportunities in the forestry profession. This approach is required to ensure that women do not continue to be marginalized in terms of access to benefits and voice in decision-making.

31. Although generally, women have made progress, more needs to be done to achieve a critical mass of women at the decision-making and managerial levels that will ensure active participation of women in all aspects of the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

32. The links among health, population, and women's involvement in public life may contribute to efforts to reduce population pressure in forests (to the advantage of both forests and women). Health issues may serve as a practical means through which to involve women in forestry.

3. Enhanced role of indigenous and local communities in sustained forest management

33. Community involvement in forest management over the past decade has ranged from participation to recognition of ownership rights to resources by indigenous groups where local people make the decisions on the management of the resources and the resultant benefits. In many instances where progress has been achieved in terms of access rights or ownership, a number of barriers, such as unsuitable obligations in forest management, regulatory burden and constraints to market entry, still limit the benefits of sustainable forest management.

34. Where long-term ownership or access rights traditionally exist, private forest owners have been recognized as key contributors to and supporters of sustainable forest management principles. In addition, indigenous communities in both the North and South are increasingly organizing themselves and taking operational steps and political action to gain ownership or greater control over benefits from protected forests, upland watershed forests, production forests and timber concessions.

(a) Progress and trends in the implementation of relevant proposals for action

35. National forest programmes and policies emphasize the need for active public participation, especially by forest-dependent communities, as they are directly affected by decisions made with regard to the forests. This often includes a commitment by all stakeholders, especially the State, to create an enabling environment on the ground that allows space for preferences, perceptions and interests of people living in and around forests, as well as local communities.

36. Most Member States reported that various policy and regulatory instruments had been put in place to ensure that indigenous and local communities were involved in and benefited from the management of forest resources that they depended on. Although policies and forestry programmes are largely explicit about encouraging participation, implementation has been a great challenge for most countries. Cases on progress in the involvement of indigenous communities in forest resource management suggest that local people often respond enthusiastically to these initiatives, but are often disillusioned because bureaucracies fail to transfer significant authority, financial benefits are less than expected and powerful local elites seize any increase in authority or benefits. This is often the result of inadequate understanding of devolution policies in terms of capacity-building requirements for both government administrations and community-based organizations.

37. In most Member States, government forestry departments, as well as non-governmental organizations, are now involving local communities in the planning and implementation of forest management programmes. Protected forest areas, which were previously managed by government forest departments, usually to the exclusion of surrounding communities, are increasingly being managed jointly with local resource users. These co-management initiatives have allowed surrounding communities to benefit from key resources in protected forest areas subject to mutually agreed management plans. Forestry departments have also benefited from increased cooperation and self-policing from the surrounding communities, as exclusionary approaches had proved to be logistically and financially untenable.

38. At least 60 countries in the developing world have given local and provincial governments greater scope to manage some aspects of natural resource management during the past decade. In a few countries, restitution policies have allowed indigenous communities to successfully claim ownership rights to forests, resulting in them being key decision makers in the management of these forests. Generally, these cases, in which ownership or sufficient authority is given directly to resource users, tend to be more rewarding and responsive to local needs than allocating control to local government or district structures. In most such cases, local people are often well organized and supported by non-governmental organizations and other influential partners. Canada, Panama, the Philippines and South Africa are among the countries that are at different stages of exploring and implementing policy and legal mechanisms to reach agreements with aboriginal and tribal peoples to establish indigenous forest territories with varying degrees of autonomy. It is estimated that local communities and indigenous peoples now own 14 per cent of all forests in developing countries.

(b) Experiences and lessons learned

39. In many countries, participatory and community forestry is proving to be a cost-effective and socially acceptable approach to achieving sustainable resource management. Communities and small private forest owners are also becoming increasingly concerned with forest degradation and are organizing themselves to take action against the illegal exploitation of forests and also to claim rights for greater control of those resources.

40. Where long-term ownership or access rights traditionally exist or have been transferred in a transparent way, communities and private forest owners have without doubt benefited from that empowerment, in addition to the direct benefits they get from the forest. It has been observed that good forest governance may lead to good governance in general.

41. Intracommunity variations that characterize most communities have not been adequately addressed in efforts to work with communities, including issues of ethnicity, power, wealth and gender. Achieving a sustained collective effort towards a common vision remains one of the biggest challenges in working with highly heterogeneous communities. In practice, identifying the "community" that should be involved in and benefit from forest resources has been difficult. Local-level administrative boundaries are rarely consistent with locally appreciated resource use boundaries, which tend to be fuzzy and highly flexible and to respond to a whole range of biophysical and social factors. Often, the attempt to impose strict boundaries undermines local livelihood systems and coping strategies, usually to the detriment of the most vulnerable households.

42. In the particular case of countries with economies in transition, forests have been or are still being restituted to their former owners. Small private forest owners now possess a large share of forests in their respective countries, although these private forests or family forests are very numerous and fragmented. Forest institutions and forest owners have not yet adapted to this new situation, which results in a breakdown of forest management systems. The transfer of forest ownership cannot be carried out abruptly. It requires appropriate measures to build capacities for sustainable forest management, develop suitable institutional frameworks and create a sense of ownership.

43. From the point of view of the local resource users, lack of secure tenure or sufficient authority to make decisions on the use and management of forest resources can be frustrating. Devolution of authority over resources has often been from central government to local government, and rarely to the resource users themselves. In cases where significant authority to make decisions on forest resources have been devolved to local levels, more powerful local elites have often captured the benefits of collective action, in the absence of appropriate local institutions.

44. Transforming local traditional institutional arrangements for managing forestry resources into more accountable and transparent structures is often more elusive than perceived, although building on these institutional arrangements is still the best option in many countries. More still needs to be done to ensure that local institutional arrangements have checks and balances against the capture of all control and benefits by powerful local elites. Much of the effort to decentralize has stopped short of a real transfer of authority and power to communities and, in some cases, has actually decreased local communities' authority over the resources they have managed traditionally.

45. Other setbacks to active participation by local people include the long-term nature of most forestry investments, which discourages people from participating in production and management; disputes over such resources as water and land, which undermine collective action; and the nomadic lifestyle of some indigenous communities.

B. Emerging issues

46. When looked at collectively, the scope of the IPF/IFF proposals for action on social and cultural aspects of forests is limited, especially with regard to cultural aspects. Issues, such as integrating the cultural, spiritual and ethical values of forests into sustainable forest management, welfare of forest labour, corporate responsibility and poverty alleviation, as well as forest versus conflict management, have not been addressed. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of literature on these issues that can help to orientate work in this field. The significant decline in employment in the forest sector is expected to continue in a number of countries.[9] The social implications, especially the impact on rural livelihoods, deserve due consideration.

47. Forests and culture have been intertwined throughout human history.[10] On the one hand, forest landscapes are formed by cultural belief and management systems, and on the other hand cultures are materially and spiritually built upon the interaction between man and forests. These can include sacred groves and trees as powerful symbols, such as the Tree of Life in Mesopotamia and India, which feature in many of the world's religions, the Amazon World Tree and the oak trees of England and Scotland, among others. Numerous other examples of spiritual and cultural values of forests are provided in this invaluable reference, including culturally based forest management systems. Traditional knowledge and use of species that provide numerous economic benefits to local communities are highlighted. Attention is given to forest management and conservation, rooted in cultural perspectives and appreciation of forests and their components.

48. Existing literature provides a comprehensive analysis of the conceptual foundations of and basic principles in forestry ethics,[11] which review a number of

codes of ethics relevant to natural resources, including the Code of Ethics for Members of the Society of American Foresters. It also addresses ethnical issues in global forestry, touching on issues such as harvesting, wood use and trade, as well as critical issues, such as land tenure and governance, that need to be addressed in enhancing local community participation in sustainable forest management.[12]

49. The analysis of experiences in decentralization in forestry and conflict management and the recommendations on processes for effective policy-making and implementation is of particular relevance in this regard.[13]

1. Linking social and cultural aspects of sustainable forest management to the Millennium Development Goals

50. Currently, the IPF/IFF proposals for action are quite narrow and not adequately linked to the global debate on the development agenda. Every opportunity must be taken to link specific forestry actions to global development issues, to gain a broader profile for forests and forestry. In so doing, the social and cultural needs of local people are also likely to be better met, as outcomes will be firmly centred on the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

51. The poor demonstration and documentation of the linkages between the role of forests and poverty reduction has manifested in insufficient allocation of national resources and official development assistance for sustainable forest management. Owing to the insufficient allocation of these resources, the transition to sustainable forest management and its potential benefits to forest-dependent communities have not been achieved to the desirable extent. Unsustainable forestry practices adversely impact on social cohesiveness of forest-dependent communities and the environment.

52. Poverty reduction strategy papers could promote awareness and contribute effectively to poverty reduction aspects of the forest sector. The papers could address the barriers that exist for enhanced access to official development assistance for sustainable forest management.

2. Social impact assessment for sustainable forest management

53. Social impact assessment, although a project-based tool, offers insights into the broad range of topics covered by the international arrangement on forests, if the full spectrum of social and cultural issues is to be tackled. Some of the topics to be addressed include:

- Way of life: how people live, work and interact
- Culture: shared beliefs, customs and values
- Community: its cohesion, stability, character, services and facilities
- Political systems: the extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratization
- Environment: the quality of the air and water that people use, the availability and quality of the food that they eat, the level of hazard or risk, the adequacy of sanitation, their physical safety, and their access to and control over resources

- Health and well-being: defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity
- Personal and property rights: particularly whether people are economically affected, or experience disadvantage, which may include a violation of their civil liberties
- Fears and aspirations: people's perceptions about safety, their fears about the future of their community and their aspirations for their future and that of their children.

54. Resource use patterns are often dependent on all these social factors. With respect to resource governance, there is a need to devise with systems that promote a mutually acceptable balance of power and authority among local communities, regional authorities and the State, following the principle of subsidiarity[14] in order to protect local interests, as well as the wider interests of neighbouring communities and other stakeholders.

3. Decentralization and devolution of authority to local levels

55. The need to devolve appropriate authority over resources to local levels should be accompanied by strategies to strengthen the capacity of local-level institutions to be adaptive and responsive to local needs in order to be able to recognize the needs of the marginalized group. Evolving institutions should be able to deal with power dynamics within communities and guarantee accountability and transparency to gain legitimacy among local people. Ultimately, the challenge is to ensure that decentralized authority is more accountable and transparent than centralized authority has been.

56. The country-led initiative, in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, on decentralization, federal systems in forestry and national forest programmes, held in Interlaken, Switzerland, in April 2004, sponsored by the Governments of Indonesia and Switzerland, the United Nations Forum on Forests secretariat and the Centre for International Forestry Research, will explore how countries that are undergoing decentralization are addressing more effectively social and cultural concerns, interests and needs. For the meeting, although the IPF/IFF proposals for action do not refer specifically to decentralization, those proposals for action that are of relevance have been identified. These refer principally to participatory mechanisms, the integration of local interests in national forest programmes, the necessary enabling conditions and support mechanisms and critical issues, such as equitable benefit sharing, land tenure and resource use rights, and protection of traditional forest-related knowledge.

4. Monitoring trends in devolution of authority

57. While there is a shared recognition that devolution of authority over forest resources to communities and other local stakeholders is gradually taking place worldwide, there is no accurate monitoring of this trend. Devolution can take place in various forms, from permanent ownership to limited access rights. To guide policy makers who are instrumental in the promotion of participatory forestry, there is a need to improve existing knowledge on forest ownership and devolution of

authority, and to develop the appropriate monitoring methodologies and incorporate them into forest assessments.

5. Conflict management among stakeholders

58. The involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making will, in many cases, reveal conflicting concerns and needs that will have to be brokered. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in other areas in conflict management, which is generally a more constructive approach than conflict resolution. Greater attention has to be given to the development of mechanisms and guidelines for conflict management in support of sustainable forest management.

6. Trees outside forests

59. Trees outside forests are an important resource for rural people in many regions, particularly in arid countries where forest cover is limited. Trees can provide food, medicinal products and materials that support the livelihoods of rural people, protect against land degradation and help to regulate hydrological processes, among other things.

7. Urban and peri-urban forests

60. Urban and peri-urban forests are of increasing importance during the last two decades, particularly in developing countries. These forests have long been recognized in developed countries as important resources for, among other things, recreation, education and quality of life, but with demographic shifts in developing regions, mostly in Asia and Latin America, these resources are coming under increasing pressure and are taking on a greater importance for a variety of reasons.

8. Forest ethics

61. By adopting the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the world's leaders recognized their moral responsibility for human well-being, environmental sustainability and the livelihood and cultural integrity of peoples around the world. Correspondingly, in the World Summit on Sustainable Development process, considerable attention was given to the need for sustainable development actions to be based on a sound ethical framework, building on common elements of different religious and ethical systems, such as the Earth Charter, which is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the twenty-first century.[15,16]

62. In addition, there has been development of a global code of ethics in forest-related sectors, such as ecotourism and international trade in chemicals,[17] and of codes of ethics for professional forestry associations and institutes in several countries.

63. At the grass-roots level, there is growing activism focusing on the marketplace and the moral conscience in the consumers of forest products. These organizations work on educating consumers, large corporate purchasers and distributors making them aware of the social and environmental impacts and the ethical dimensions of their purchasing decisions. At the core of this issue is the recognition of the importance of corporate responsibility.

C. Means of implementation

64. In most countries, meaningful involvement of local communities and women in the planning and implementation of forest management was believed to be undermined by highly limited financial resources and lack of appropriate human skills. Lack of political commitment to devolution of authority over resources to local people was also cited as a major setback to efforts to creating sufficient confidence among local people to actively participate in forest resource. The major challenge for most countries was the limited number of people skilled in conflict management and negotiation to reach an acceptable power balance among stakeholders. In most countries, the need to train bureaucrats to have a more bottom-up, flexible, responsive attitude and to learn about dealing with communities still remains. Expertise in facilitating the transformation of local institutions into more transparent and accountable entities is also limited in most countries.

65. More innovative models for technology transfer are also required, as most countries still rely on conventional extension approaches, which are currently constrained by limited resources. New approaches to knowledge transfer, which include training of trainers, training for transformation, experiential learning and action research, are being used with encouraging results.

D. Common items

1. Monitoring, assessment and reporting on social data

66. A number of countries have now designed very detailed and integrative frameworks for monitoring and reporting social data on forest use and management. Although countries report that these have proved to be very useful for both short-term and long-term planning, sustained implementation of these monitoring initiatives is threatened by the lack of sufficient resources to conduct the process thoroughly. Some countries have either discontinued monitoring and assessment activities or have restricted them to high-value forest areas, especially where harvesting is planned or ongoing.

2. Promoting public participation

67. The general trend towards more attention for strengthening stakeholder participation in policy processes has gained momentum in the forestry sector. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests principles, and its respective successors, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and the United Nations Forum on Forests, which guide the formulation and implementation of national forest programmes, explicitly stress the need for participation of and partnerships with all stakeholders in a shared effort to achieve sustainable forest management. Greater stakeholder ownership in national forest programme processes, taking into account the needs of civil society, is expected to facilitate the successful implementation of forest policies, which promote decentralization and devolution of authority to local levels. However, there is a wide and diversified understanding about what participation means. Furthermore, there is very little knowledge and information available to provide guidance for those organizations that intend to conduct participatory processes. As a result, many participatory processes are implemented without serious consideration being given to the implications in terms of planning and

resource allocation to support stakeholder participation. Appropriate knowledge in methods and approaches to support participation in national forest programme processes is required to provide guidance to increase and optimize stakeholder participation. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with the support of the National Forest Programme Facility, has put enhancing stakeholder participation in national forest programmes into practice to respond to this need.

68. Moreover, increased networking is needed to capture and better share the existing wealth of experience and expertise in participatory forestry in order to contribute to a better understanding of the decentralization and devolution processes.

3. Social aspects addressed in national forest programmes

69. A shift in worldwide trends towards more people-oriented approaches to achieving sustainable forest management has resulted in most countries emphasizing social aspects in their national forest programmes. Most country forest management strategies now reflect the realization that sustainable forest management involves more than solving technical problems and is largely about dealing with people's social, economic and cultural factors that either enhance or undermine their ability to benefit from sustainable use of the resource base. In order to facilitate learning and appreciation of local people's concerns and aspirations, national forest programmes are increasingly adopting participatory approaches to undertaking research, and to planning and implementing forestry projects. In achieving this, many national forest management divisions have positioned themselves to be learning organizations that give priority to attaining tangible social and economic benefits for local people, especially those that depend on forests. This "people first" perspective is integral to the social forestry approach, in which trees and people, their livelihood, social organization, needs, and cultural and economic endeavours are intrinsically associated.

IV. Conclusions

70. **The scope of the IPF/IFF proposals for action on social and cultural aspects is limited, especially concerning cultural aspects. Social and cultural aspects of forests needs to be more mainstreamed in the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, with greater attention being paid to emerging issues, such as linkages to the Millennium Development Goals, social impact assessment of sustainable forest management, decentralization and devolution of authority to local levels, conflict management among stakeholders and forest ethics.**

71. **Social and cultural aspects of forests now feature prominently in forestry policy and legislation of most countries. A notable shift in perspectives towards more people-oriented forestry is evident in both the North and South. To place forests and forestry firmly in the global debate, it is necessary to be explicit about the links between specific proposals for action and broader development goals.**

72. **Progress in achieving greater and more equitable sharing of benefits has, however, been limited by the lack of implementation of many policy provisions that are central to social forestry. This is often the result of a lack of confidence that local stakeholders can manage forest resources. The slow progress in giving local people ownership and control over forest resources they depend on has undermined local people's enthusiasm to actively participate in forestry. Limited resources and facilitation skills has also undermined efforts to transform local-level institutions into more transparent and accountable entities that can ensure equitable access and benefit sharing in forestry.**

73. **The significant decline in employment in the forest sector is expected to continue in a number of countries. The social implications, especially the impact on rural livelihoods deserve due consideration.**

V. Points for discussion

74. The Forum may wish to:

(a) **Commit to continuing and urge Member States to continue the efforts to mainstream the IPF/IFF proposals for action on social and cultural aspects of forests in national forest programmes and strategies in support of sustainable forest management, with a view to increasing the effective participation of the people living in and around forests, including forest workers, local communities, small, private forest owners and indigenous peoples, of which women form an integral part, and in promoting the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of forest goods and services;**

(b) **Commit to reviewing and urge Member States to review national forest programmes, strategies, forestry standards and codes of practice, so as to document the contribution of forests to poverty-reduction activities, and to ensure the observation of internationally recognized labour standards;**

(c) **Invite Collaborative Partnership on Forests members to prepare a synthesis report of the contribution of the forest sector in meeting the targets set forth in the United Nations Millennium Declaration for consideration at the fifth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, in conjunction with the review of progress and consideration on future action;**

(d) **Encourage the establishment of instruments to promote equitable sharing of the benefits from forest goods and services, including indirect methods of rewarding source individuals and communities, such as the use of transfer payments for forest products and services provided;**

(e) **Urge Member States to adopt the application of social impact assessment methodologies in their national forest programmes and strategies;**

(f) **Recommend that Member States take into account the lessons learned and proposals concerning decentralization and devolution of authority, building on the deliberations at the country-led initiative on decentralization, federal systems in forestry and national forest programmes, held in Interlaken, Switzerland, in April 2004.**

Notes

[1] The common themes include (a) promoting public participation; (b) national forest programmes; and (c) monitoring, assessment and reporting.

[2] See the report of the Secretary-General on economic aspects of forests (E/CN.18/2003/7), presented at the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, held in Geneva from 26 May to 6 June 2003, para. 37.

[3] IFF 64 (a), IFF 64 (b), IFF 64 (c), IFF 64 (e) and IFF 67.

[4] IFF 84, IFF 85 (b), IFF 85 (c) and IFF 85 (d).

[5] IPF 58 (b) (ii), IPF 58 (b) (iii) and IFF 64 (g).

[6] IPF 58 (b) (iv), IPF 70 (b), IPF 104 (a), IPF 128 (a), IPF 133 (c) (v), IPF 133 (d) (iv) and IFF 64 (i).

[7] A total of 17 proposals under IPF 40.

[8] IFF 74 (a), IFF 74 (b), IFF 74 (c), IFF 74 (d), IFF 75, IPF 46 and IFF 89.

[9] Blomback, P., Poschen, P. and Lövgren, M. Employment trends and prospects in the European forest sector. A study prepared for the European Forest Sector Outlook Study. Geneva Timber and Forest Discussion Papers ECE/TIM/DP/29, United Nations, Economic Commission for Europe Timber Committee, 2003.

[10] United Nations Environment Programme, "Chapter 9: Forests Culture and Conservation", by Sarah A. Laird, in *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1999), pp. 345-396.

[11] Peter C. List, ed., *Environment Ethics and Forestry: A Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[12] Clark C. Gibson et al., eds. People and Forests: Communities, Institutions, and Governance (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000).

[13] James Mayers and Stephen Bass, Policy that Works for Forests and People, Series No. 7 (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 1999).

[14] The subsidiarity principle suggests that decisions about resources are best made by structures closest to those resources. Only those decisions that cannot be made at a local level because of their wider implications beyond the local area should be made at a higher level.

[15] The Earth Charter: Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future. A brochure is available online at www.earthcharter.org.

[16] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization General Conference resolution 32 C/COM.III/DR.1, adopted on 16 October 2003.

[17] The General Assembly adopted resolution 56/212, entitled "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism", on 21 December 2001. The Code of Ethics on International Trade in Chemicals was adopted in 1994 by the United Nations Environment Programme.